

The Pacification of Ghent.

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they had remained, to hold out the hand of fellowship to the Calvinist rebels of Holland and Zealand. In this emergency William saw his grand opportunity. Not only did it afford a pretext for the arrest of the more obnoxious Councillors of State, who had vainly tried to assuage the popular wrath by proscribing the mutinous soldiers; the union of Holland and Zealand, confirmed and completed, on the basis of liberty of conscience by the Estates at Delft (April 1576), became the nucleus of the wider union which for a brief period focussed the resentments and grievances of the other provinces in a general revolt. The result was the congress of the States-General at Brussels, and the Pacification of Ghent (8th November 1576), which bound the contracting provinces to expel the Spaniards, suspended all edicts against heresy, struck a truce in the matter of religion, with guarantees against the persecution of Catholics in the Calvinist, of Protestants in the Catholic provinces, and recognised the prince, meanwhile, as king's lieutenant and commander of the confederation, pending another meeting of Estates.

Thus the two religious parties at length, by force of circumstances, recognised the great principle of toleration for which William had so long fought. If the contracting parties could continue loyal to this principle, there was little more to be feared from Philip and the Inquisition. In the new governor-general, Don John, his natural brother and the hero of Lepanto, Philip found another great soldier who had imbibed the spirit of the crusader in the wars against the infidel Turks and Moors, and was only too eager to employ his military talents in smiting the heretics of the north. But Don John was a very light champion indeed to pit in political duel against the great patriot statesman who now appeared master of the situation. Moreover, if two small provinces had resisted the might of Spain for ten years, it

was certain that the united strength of
seventeen would
speedily put the keystone to the work of
deliverance, for all
that Don John could do to prevent it.
Unfortunately, union
on the basis of toleration proved an impossible
policy.
Calvinist and Catholic could not long continue to
ignore their
religious shibboleths for the sake of great
political ends, and
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